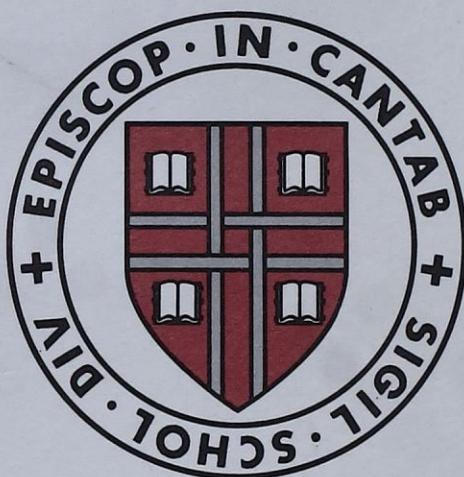


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**A Whole Priesthood: The Philadelphia Ordinations (1974)  
and the Continuing Dilemmas of Race in the Episcopal Church**

*Gardiner H. Shattuck Jr.*



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
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# A WHOLE PRIESTHOOD: THE PHILADELPHIA ORDINATIONS (1974) AND THE CONTINUING DILEMMAS OF RACE IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Gardiner H. Shattuck Jr.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gardiner Shattuck is a lecturer in the history of Christianity at Andover Newton Theological School. He has received degrees from Brown University (B.A., 1970), General Theological Seminary (M.Div., 1975), and Harvard University (M.A., 1981 and Ph.D., 1985). He is author of *A Shield and Hiding Place: The Religious Life of the Civil War Armies* (Mercer University Press, 1987) and *Episcopalians and Race: Civil War to Civil Rights* (University Press of Kentucky, 2000), and co-author of *The Encyclopedia of American Religious History* (Facts on File, 1996). An Episcopal priest, Shattuck has served in parishes in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and he also works as an editorial associate at Cowley Publications in Boston.

*Another version of this essay will be presented at the Anglican History in North America conference in Toronto on June 26, 2001.*

The approach I take in this article may be somewhat akin to the 1995 controversy over the Smithsonian exhibit commemorating the end of World War II: a historian's proposal of revisionist interpretations that perhaps run counter to the memories of many of the participants in the historical incident being discussed. I am examining here the ordinations that took place at the Church of the Advocate in Philadelphia on July 29, 1974 – a major religious event in which struggles over gender and racial equality in American society dramatically intersected. This essay arises out of the research I conducted for my book *Episcopalians and Race*.<sup>1</sup> Looking at the Philadelphia ordinations within the context of *race* as well as gender, I am going to suggest – in good postmodernist fashion – that there is no single “master narrative” of the event, but at least three possible ways in which historians can narrate and interpret the meaning of what transpired in Philadelphia on that day:

- the first sees the ordinations emerging smoothly out of the civil rights movement;
- the second sees the issue of women's power in the church as being in conflict – whether intentionally or not – with some



- aspects of the civil rights movement;
- and the third employs Toni Morrison's discussion of how people of European descent "play in the dark" in order to invent an identity for themselves as superior, "white" Americans.

In addition, let me add a personal note at the outset. While I did not attend the Philadelphia ordinations – I was immersed in a CPE program at a New York hospital that summer – I was present at the festive eucharist celebrated by Carter Heyward, Alison Cheek, and Jeannette Piccard at Riverside Church on Reformation Sunday in October 1974. The various points I will try to make, therefore, are in no way meant to question the appropriateness of the Philadelphia ordinations. Instead, this paper will examine the service at the Church of the Advocate as a historical event that took place within a particular social and cultural context, and it will show how memories of that event, and the meanings and narratives surrounding it, need to be in a continual state of reevaluation and interpretation.

My first narrative is a familiar one, I think, and uses the insights of former civil rights activist Sara Evans as its starting point. Ever since the publication of Evans's book *Personal Politics* (1979) about twenty years ago, mainstream historians have generally looked for – as the subtitle of the book suggests – "the roots of women's liberation in the civil rights movement." In her account, Evans discusses numerous white women like herself for whom involvement in the racial struggles in the South in the 1960s was an experience that helped

sharpen a sense of their own oppression and produced "a mass constituency for the women's liberation movement." As another white civil rights activist, Dorothy Dawson Burlage, has recently observed, there was a clear "connection between the segregation of blacks and the creation of suffocating roles for women" in the 1950s. Thanks to their civil rights work with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Burlage, Evans, and other middle-class women developed a commitment to overcoming *all* forms of injustice in American society. Moreover, when the growing emphasis on "Black Power" called into question the interracial character of the civil rights coalition, whites felt free to use the insights they had gained in the movement in order "to create something of their own."<sup>2</sup>

One of the initial goals of the emerging women's movement was the enforcement of the gender discrimination component of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act – a section intended to forbid discrimination in employment on the basis of sex, which had been added to the law in a cynical but unsuccessful attempt by conservative politicians to defeat the civil rights bill in Congress. In December 1965, Episcopal lay woman and lawyer Pauli Murray published an article in which she equated "Jane Crow" with Jim Crow, arguing that the rights of women and the rights of African Americans were "only different phases of the fundamental and indivisible issue of human rights."<sup>3</sup> After Murray's views came to the attention of writer Betty Friedan, the two began to discuss the need to organize a network that would fight gender



discrimination and keep pressure on the government regarding Title VII. When it became apparent that male officials were simply going to ignore that aspect of the civil rights law, Friedan and Murray led the way in founding the National Organization for Women (NOW) in the fall of 1966. Because of the activities of NOW and other women's organizations in the late 1960s, the national media gave increasing attention to the rise of feminism and demands for gender equality.<sup>4</sup>

Within this narrative structure, Sara Evans's ideas about the connections between the civil rights movement and the women's movement can similarly be applied to the struggle of women for ordination in the Episcopal Church. At a meeting organized by the Episcopal Peace Fellowship in April 1970, for instance, Pauli Murray and others prepared a statement criticizing the Episcopal Church for its racism, militarism, sexism, and general inability to be a positive and progressive force within American society. That meeting also called for the application of Title VII to the church's own employment practices and for the inclusion of women at all levels of both lay and ordained leadership. This appeal for justice was at least partially addressed at the 1970 General Convention when women were seated for the first time as members of the House of Deputies and the canons of the denomination were clarified to allow for the ordination of women to the diaconate.<sup>5</sup> Although forty-two women were ordained to the diaconate between the General Conventions of 1970 and 1973, supporters of women's rights were stymied in 1973 when the convention refused to sanction the ordination of women to the priesthood.<sup>6</sup>

Conservatives argued that the church was courting disaster by encouraging women to step out of the domestic sphere into which God had placed them and exercise leadership roles that were properly reserved for men. As deacons Emily Hewitt and Suzanne Hiatt observed, however, the conservatives' argument had "a disquietingly familiar ring," reminiscent of the "separate but equal" doctrine that was created to crush the aspirations of African Americans prior to the *Brown* Supreme Court decision of 1954. In 1973, Hiatt and Hewitt insisted, "women, like blacks, are no longer staying in their place."<sup>7</sup> Using the "integration" paradigm still popular among whites committed to the civil rights movement, Hiatt, Hewitt, and other proponents of women's ordination emphasized that they wished to end artificial barriers between male and female, thereby creating "a *Whole Priesthood*" in which women and men could serve together as equals in the church.<sup>8</sup>

After the General Convention of 1973 rejected women's ordination to the priesthood, several months of discussion and negotiation ensued. These meetings eventually culminated in the decision by a group of Episcopalians to circumvent the usual canonical procedures by ordaining eleven women to the priesthood in defiance of the church's established lines of authority. The symbolic importance of this proposed act of ecclesiastical disobedience was emphasized by the nature of the parish that offered to host the historic ordination service: the Church of the Advocate in Philadelphia, a predominantly African American parish led by Paul Washington, an outspoken civil rights and black power advocate. Although the Advocate was selected in part because of the size of its



building, the church's location within a struggling black neighborhood seemed particularly appropriate for a religious celebration at which a band of white women would cut themselves off from the mainstream of their denomination.<sup>9</sup> Suzanne Hiatt, one of the prospective ordinands, not only was a member of the Advocate, but also served as the suburban missionary of the diocese of Pennsylvania. She had worked for several years with a group of middle-class white women, teaching them to see the relationship between racial prejudice and sexual inequality in the communities where they lived.<sup>10</sup> Alla Bozarth-Campbell, another woman who was to be ordained at the Advocate, similarly credited her experiences at the Urban Training Center in Chicago with enlightening her about "the nature of human oppression" and "the parallels between racism and sexism." Awareness of the "alienation and desperation that characterize inner-city life," she said, helped open her eyes to her "own oppression as a woman in a society that devalues womanhood."<sup>11</sup>

Despite unusually short notice about the time and location of the planned ordinations, approximately two thousand people filled the Church of the Advocate to overflowing on the morning of July 29, 1974. The women of the parish fashioned an altar frontal with words derived from Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, black nor white, male nor female; we are one in Christ."<sup>12</sup> Three retired white bishops readily volunteered to ordain the candidates: Robert DeWitt, who had recently resigned from his position as bishop of Pennsylvania; Daniel Corrigan, the former director of the Home Department of the

national Episcopal Church; and Edward Welles, the retired bishop of West Missouri and father of Katrina Swanson, one of the ordinands. Despite strong objections from many of their episcopal colleagues, DeWitt, Corrigan, and Welles announced their determination "to be true to the Gospel understanding of human unity in Christ" by ordaining the women to the priesthood. Although their opponents accused them of acting in a fashion contrary to the church's laws, the bishops appealed to the higher authority of individual conscience reminiscent of the statements of Martin Luther King Jr. and other African Americans who engaged in acts of civil disobedience during the civil rights movement. The bishops called the ordinations "an act of obedience to the Spirit ... intended as an act of solidarity with those in whatever institution, in whatever part of the world, of whatever stratum of society, who in their search for freedom, for liberation, for dignity, are moved by that same Spirit to struggle against sin."<sup>13</sup> Inspired by this ideal, Barbara Harris, senior warden of the Advocate, carried the cross at the head of the procession that morning, and eleven women deacons with their presenters followed her into the church.<sup>14</sup>

Charles Willie, then the vice-president of the House of Deputies, braved considerable criticism in order to preach at the service. In his sermon, Willie declared that there were clear parallels between the civil rights movement and the women's movement in the church. He reminded the congregation that, just "as blacks refused to participate in their own oppression by going to the back of the bus in 1955 in Montgomery," the white women who were being ordained that



day were "refusing to cooperate in their own oppression by remaining on the periphery of full participation in the Church." As an African American who recognized both the racism and the sexism practiced by the denomination's white male leadership, Willie vowed to uphold the belief that all people are "priests in the kingdom of God and have a right to fully participate in the affairs of Church and society."<sup>15</sup> Pauli Murray, who was also present at the service, expressed a view similar to Willie's. She was extremely pleased with the symbolic value of the event, she said, because it had taken place "in a church in the heart of the Philadelphia ghetto." Since an African American congregation had hosted the ordinations, Murray believed that the struggle against racism and the struggle against sexism had intersected at a profoundly moving moment ... when "the rejected opened their arms to the rejected."<sup>16</sup>

The narrative I have just presented, based on documents and eyewitness testimonies of the Philadelphia ordinations, now functions, I think, as the normative account of what took place at the Church of the Advocate on July 29, 1974. Based on what many participants and observers have said and written about the event, the ordination of the first eleven women to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church arises almost seamlessly out of the involvement of white women like them in the civil rights movement. However, without denying either the reality or the importance of that interpretation, I would like to present a second narrative that illustrates some of the discontinuities between the women's movement in the church and the

African American freedom struggle.

Paul Griffin, who is a professor of African American studies at Wright State University, has recently published a book entitled, *Seeds of Racism in the Soul of America*. In this book, Griffin analyzes the history of racism in this country in areas where scholars have not usually examined it. While most Americans "continue to heap the bulk of blame for the persistence of racist ideas on rednecks ..., white supremacists ..., and political conservatives" in the South, he writes, we really ought to be looking at historic patterns of racial oppression practiced among white liberals in the North. Griffin holds up five groups for special criticism: seventeenth-century New England Puritans; nineteenth-century Social Darwinists; the twentieth-century Religious Right; contemporary white academics; and radical white feminists. When speaking about the last group, Griffin cites the unintended consequences of the addition of women's rights to Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act – the congressional action applauded by Pauli Murray, Betty Friedan, and others – as the principal mechanism by which racism entered the feminist ranks. Because of Title VII, he argues, "white women rode into power on the back of the civil rights movement," and since the mid-1960s they used the unhappy plight of black men and black women to gain entrance into the same structures of privilege long enjoyed by white men. Although white feminists have often claimed that they share a common oppression with people of color, Griffin believes that gender has proved to be far less of an obstacle than race to those seeking advancement in American society.<sup>17</sup>



Whatever the exact merits of this argument, it continues a critique that began in the early 1970s among African Americans who decried the tendency of middle-class white women to compare themselves to poor blacks. Frances Beal of the Third World Women's Alliance, for example, worried that, if white women assumed the positions of power then held exclusively by white men, it was likely that they would just "turn around and use their white skin for the same white privileges."<sup>18</sup> Class, too, was an important factor in this analysis. Working-class women active in labor organizations claimed to be focussed only on equitable salaries and thus unconcerned about the status questions that affected middle-class feminists. As one labor activist declared, "the women's movement really got started within the middle-class white woman's back yard, and not the black woman's back yard."<sup>19</sup> This statement is consistent with historian Virginia Brereton's observations about those who were involved in women's church organizations in the mid-twentieth century. Those white women functioned as "both insiders and outsiders" within the American religious establishment, she says. They stood "just enough on the peripheries of institutional church life to have a slightly different notion of their mission" than male leaders, but they also enjoyed the same economic and social advantages of the "men they married or who fathered them." Yet because they remained outside the centers of power in the church, Brereton suggests, "they sometimes exhibited naivete ... and underestimated the difficulties in bringing about real social change."<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the 1960s, as white Episcopal women began to see the relationship between

the rhetoric of the civil rights movement and the need for greater recognition of their contributions in the church, some expressed resentment that race had become the obsession of the church's male leadership. Mindful, perhaps, of historic racial conventions that required white men to act as the protectors of white women against the alleged sexual aggression and assertiveness of black men, these Episcopalians asked why the clergy they knew now seemed more concerned about discrimination against African Americans rioting in the streets than about the status of white lay women serving quietly in their parishes.<sup>21</sup> For instance, Frances Benz of Cleveland Heights, Ohio wrote the director of the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity (the church's principal civil rights organization) in 1962 to say that she would not join the organization because it was only concerned about *racial* integration and the status of *black men* in the United States. White women suffered from even more discrimination in church affairs than African Americans, she said, but civil rights organizations never mentioned their rights or attempted to integrate them into leadership positions. "Your present pleas for equality are logically invalid," she concluded, "when you overlook the rights of half of those from whom you are seeking support."<sup>22</sup> A few years later, Olga Walker of Rochester, New York wrote a letter to *The Living Church* magazine in which she recorded her chagrin at the lack of militancy in the church on behalf of equal rights for women. Although male clergy were perfectly willing to fight for the rights of black men, she wrote, they seemed indifferent to the white women seeking to provide leadership in their



congregations and dioceses.<sup>23</sup> Their disturbing racial overtones notwithstanding, these observations were certainly valid when applied to the church at the national level. As Mary Donovan points out, African Americans were underrepresented at the General Convention and on the Executive Council; women, on the other hand, were not only underrepresented on the council, but prior to 1970 they were also barred entirely from the convention.<sup>24</sup>

The 1967 General Convention, at which a constitutional change was introduced that granted women the right to be elected as deputies, seemed to represent a breakthrough in the church's official attitude toward African Americans as well as toward women. In response to the violence that exploded in black neighborhoods in Detroit, Newark, and other American cities during the summer of 1967, the convention approved an ambitious \$9 million plan (later dubbed the General Convention Special Program, or GCSP) intended to aid the economic empowerment of the country's poorest citizens. At the same time, the Episcopal Church Women (ECW) were asked at their own Triennial Meeting to contribute money from the United Thank Offering to the denomination's new outreach program. If women wished to be a part of the total church, Presiding Bishop John Hines and other national church leaders argued, then they needed to demonstrate their full integration in denominational affairs by redirecting funds traditionally allocated to "women's work" to the proposed urban crisis fund. The ECW delegates saw wisdom in this advice and so pledged the substantial sum of \$3 million over the next three years to the new social justice

program. In agreeing to what the church's top male leaders proposed, the Episcopal Church Women placed themselves at the forefront of their denomination's response to the racial crisis of the late 1960s, for the bishops, clergy, and lay men of the convention did not officially adopt what became known as "their" program until they had first received notice of the Triennial Meeting's extraordinarily generous pledge.<sup>25</sup>

Despite this apparent willingness to have a significant portion of the women's ministries of the church subsumed under the umbrella of the black empowerment program, conflict over GCSP soon erupted. Conservative whites began to ask whether, in giving so much of its financial resources away to a program that was administered largely by black men, the trend-setting generosity of the ECW had really improved the position of women in the church. As Ilse Helmus of Uniondale, New York remarked, "it is all very well to be flexible, but ... how can the 'powers that be' leave high and dry so much of the work that has enlisted the interest and support of the women of the Church?"<sup>26</sup> Dorothy Faber, one of the leaders of the ultraconservative Foundation for Christian Theology in Victoria, Texas, was even more blunt and unrepentantly racist. She bitterly complained that the male leadership of the Episcopal Church had tricked the ECW into giving its money away to groups that favored "bloody revolution" and "anarchy" rather than religious "mission work which deserves to survive." As a consequence, she helped organize a "Christian Thank Offering" to which those whom she called "faithful Christian women" could contribute without



fear of supporting "the stranglehold black nationalists are placing on helpless Negro communities."<sup>27</sup>

These criticisms were part of a larger trend within mainline Protestantism, as some women came to resent the widening gap between their substantial contributions to the social programs of their denominations and their actual presence and influence within those bodies.<sup>28</sup> In the spring of 1968, moreover, during a process of restructuring in the Episcopal Church, the Executive Council abolished its General Division of Women's Work. Believing that women were ready to be fully integrated into the organizational structure of a purportedly modernized church, male leaders on the council regarded a separate program as superfluous, and as a result, they simply eliminated most of the decision-making positions formerly reserved for women within the denominational bureaucracy.<sup>29</sup> In response to this troubling trend, Theodora Sorg (one of the few women on the Executive Council at that time) protested that "since women are part of the whole Church, then the whole Church has got to take ... seriously" the work that women themselves could do, and not simply put them "off in a corner" or hand over their responsibilities to men.<sup>30</sup>

The ideas expressed by Cynthia Wedel, an Episcopalian active in ecumenical affairs, illustrate the tensions that a number of moderate white women in the church felt in the early 1970s. Wedel had presided over Church Women United, the leading organization for Protestant women, in the 1950s, and in 1969 she was elected as the first woman president of the National Council of

Churches. In that election, however, she defeated Albert Cleage, the first African American to be nominated for the NCC presidency, who publicly accused the council of racism because it chose a white woman over a black man.<sup>31</sup> A few months later, when she reflected on that event and on her experiences as a church leader throughout a period of upheaval and rapid cultural change, Wedel wondered if the Episcopal Church and other mainline denominations had "fallen into the trap of false alternatives," that is, thinking it was necessary to place advocacy for social causes above everything else. Wedel complained especially about the social action emphasis espoused by "a new breed of clergymen ... insensitive to the average man and woman in the pew." In contrast to the arrogance and insensitivity of that "new breed," she held up the quiet but effective work of "women in the rank-and-file church membership" who were carrying on a number of ministries without much recognition from the activist-oriented male hierarchy. A change of approach was definitely needed, she thought. Despite the temptation to dismiss her views as "condoning the status quo or 'giving in' to the forces of reaction" (as Cleage's remarks had suggested), the church would be a better place, Wedel argued, if it followed the example of its female membership, looked inward, and slowed the pace of social change for a while.<sup>32</sup>

Whether reactionary or not, Cynthia Wedel's views touched on an important issue relating to gender in the mid-twentieth century church. Since Victorian times, the religious duties of women had been defined primarily



in domestic terms, enshrining middle-class women as the moral arbiters of society while simultaneously denying them direct influence on public affairs.<sup>33</sup> Congregational life had become an extension of the home within this worldview, and it gave women an opportunity to exercise considerable authority in quasi-domestic parish organizations: ladies' social circles, sewing groups, benevolent and missionary societies, altar guilds, and the like. As historian Joan Gundersen has demonstrated, such traditional "women's work" lost status in the Episcopal Church and in other denominations during the 1960s as those at the forefront of social change – civil rights activists as well as women pressing for inclusion in public spheres once controlled by the white male power elite – radically devalued the old ideal of female domesticity.<sup>34</sup>

Leading clergy and male theologians after World War II, moreover, seemed eager to adopt the assertive masculinity projected by literary and cultural figures such as Jack Kerouac and the Beats. They stressed the need for their involvement as *men* "on the battle lines" of inner-city ministry and racial justice, and they derided the sentimentality they saw enshrined in what famed urban priest Paul Moore labeled "the matriarchal child-centered suburban parish."<sup>35</sup> Gibson Winter, the priest and social critic who popularized the concept of the "suburban captivity of the churches," expressed special concern for the men who served as clergy in those churches. He pictured them as "the number-one victim of middle-class conformity": their "scholarship, preaching, teaching, and even devotion are soon drained off into ... the middle-class preoccupation with children," their sense

of vocation transformed into a mere "supplement to the didie service."<sup>36</sup> As Stokely Carmichael's frequently cited if misunderstood quip ("the only position for women in SNCC is prone") suggests, assumptions about male superiority also dominated civil rights organizations and made any woman's wish for equality and respect seem laughable.<sup>37</sup> And even the 1965 controversy over Daniel Moynihan's discussion of matriarchy in black families revealed deep-seated resistance to the exercise of social and cultural power by women.<sup>38</sup>

In this second narrative, therefore, one sees politically liberal women seeking to define their roles in a manner that ran counter to the sexist, misogynistic posturing sometimes exhibited by male leaders who supported the civil rights movement. In addition, thanks to the tremendous impact of movements for social change on American society in the 1960s, a number of culturally conservative, middle-class white women believed that their position in the church was being subtly undermined by the aspirations of African Americans. Although I am not trying to suggest that those who participated in the Philadelphia ordinations consciously set up their struggle for justice in opposition to the black freedom movement – quite the opposite, in fact, as the first narrative demonstrates – I do think that scholars and historians need to take into account this larger context in which questions about race, gender, and class interacted as the women's movement in the church began to gain force.

The third narrative – or series of narratives



—I am proposing takes its cue from the literary and cultural analysis presented by Toni Morrison in her book *Playing in the Dark* (1993). Morrison discusses how people of European descent in America historically have created a sense of their own “whiteness” in relation to the people of African descent living in their midst. “How could one speak of profit, economy, labor, progress, suffragism, Christianity ... —of almost anything a country concerns itself with,” Morrison asks, “without having as a referent, at the heart of the discourse, ... the presence of Africans and their descendants?” This “Africanist idiom” has served a number of purposes for white Americans over the past two centuries. First, it has been “the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; ... not helpless, but licensed and powerful.” Second, the Africanist idiom has been used “to reinforce class distinctions ... as well as to assert privilege and power.” And third, it has come “to signal modernity,” in the sense that whites have associated blackness with the perception of “being hip, sophisticated, ultra-urbane” — a particularly disastrous symbolism for young African Americans in recent years.<sup>39</sup> As both theologian Cornel West and historian Winthrop Jordan have suggested in other contexts, “whiteness” is a racial category that is meaningless without the counterpart that negates it. The first Europeans who came to the New World in the seventeenth century thought of themselves as “English” when they arrived in America, but they gradually invented the racial category “white” as a way to describe themselves in relation to the “blackness” of the Africans whom they enslaved.<sup>40</sup>

Using a similar form of analysis, historian Louise Michele Newman has also recently advanced a controversial reinterpretation of American feminism within the context of race. In her *White Women's Rights* (1999), Newman shows how white women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sought to gain support for women's suffrage by shifting their arguments from gendered to racial terms, validating the equality of white women with white men by highlighting their common mastery over dark-skinned people. White women who traveled to Africa as explorers or who spent time as missionaries among American Indians in the West, for instance, were hailed both for their fearlessness *as women* and for the civilizing influence they allegedly exerted *as whites* on so-called “primitives.” In this scheme, interaction with people of color established a racial hierarchy and conveyed a subtle double meaning: it supported the legitimacy of women's rights by demonstrating the egalitarianism that existed among whites while at the same time signaling the superiority of Anglo-Saxons over other ethnic groups.<sup>41</sup>

Based on Morrison's and Newman's insights about the cultural significance of whites “playing in the dark” and about the racial overtones surrounding early twentieth-century affirmations of women's suffrage, the decision by a group of white Episcopalians to affirm the equality of God's people at an inner-city black parish was a highly intriguing one. Indeed, as Pamela Darling hints in her reflections on the Philadelphia ordinations, it was necessary for white women to travel to the margins of American society in order to



gain a place at the center of their church – an idea not inconsistent with Newman’s reflections on the racial and gendered implications of white women presenting themselves as explorers and missionaries at the turn of the century.<sup>42</sup> Thus, despite the admirable desire of all concerned to present their actions in Philadelphia as an anti-racist gesture, the location of the event functions as an ironic symbol of the continuing racial hierarchy within the church.

Two white men also serve as pivotal figures within this interpretive scheme. The first is Daniel Corrigan, former director of the denomination’s Home Department and one of the three ordaining bishops at Philadelphia. During his tenure at the Episcopal Church Center in New York, Corrigan had demonstrated his commitment to the civil rights movement by participating in protests and by being arrested on at least one well-publicized occasion.<sup>43</sup> Despite his clear support of the political rights of African Americans, however, Corrigan earned the lingering resentment of black Episcopalians when the General Convention Special Program was organized in 1967. Although most African American clergy assumed that Tollie Caution, a black priest who had been in charge of the church’s “Negro work” for over twenty years, was the logical person to direct the new black empowerment program, Corrigan (his superior within the Home Department) and most other white liberals at church headquarters regarded him with contempt. As a result, Caution was summarily dismissed from his national church position during the process when the GCSP director was named. Corrigan not only

informed the denomination’s senior black official that it was time for him to retire, but he also composed the letter of resignation he expected Caution to sign!<sup>44</sup> Making matters even worse, Corrigan played a leading role in the concurrent decision by the Executive Council to dissolve the American Church Institute, the organization that had traditionally supported and supervised the black colleges of the Episcopal Church in the South. Ignoring Caution’s advice about the dangers of abandoning the education of African Americans, the Executive Council placed the denomination’s three remaining black colleges under the direction of Corrigan, who publicly boasted of his desire to see them shut down.<sup>45</sup>

Caution’s forced retirement, the dissolution of the American Church Institute, and Corrigan’s threatened actions against the church’s black colleges brought a torrent of protest from African American clergy. Kenneth Hughes, a priest in Cambridge, Massachusetts, asked Corrigan why “a place has always been found for your *white* employees, but this one *black* employee must be kicked out after giving 22 years – the best of his life – to his church.”<sup>46</sup> John Burgess, then suffragan bishop of Massachusetts, complained that he was tired of seeing Corrigan and other white staff members at the Episcopal Church Center pass over black clergy while giving jobs to “less qualified white clergy” and “inexperienced white Johnny-Come-Latelies.”<sup>47</sup> “Who should be more knowledgeable of the situation and predicaments of people in the ghettos,” African Americans like Hughes and Burgess asked, than those like Caution and other black priests “whose lot it is to live ... and work in them



almost all their lives?"<sup>48</sup> In the opinion of Walter Dennis of New York, the answer to that question was obvious: "The Church still thinks white when it goes about its business."<sup>49</sup>

As a result of his past behavior, Corrigan's performance as a white bishop ordaining white women to the priesthood in a black parish was viewed with skepticism and resentment by a number of African American priests in the church. Although no one suggested that Corrigan had taken over the Church of the Advocate against Paul Washington's will, the symbolism of his actions in Philadelphia was not lost on those who had painful memories of his tenure as director of the Home Department in the 1960s and of other controversies surrounding the so-called "integration" of various parishes and church institutions.<sup>50</sup> Having dismissed Tollie Caution and having contemplated the elimination of the denomination's educational program for African Americans in the South, Corrigan was – for some – representative of the racial hierarchy that had always existed in the Episcopal Church.

Another revealing expression of this racial hierarchy comes from William Stringfellow, a white lawyer and theologian who was an outspoken supporter of the "Philadelphia 11." After the women had been ordained priests, church officials were forced to decide what their exact status in the church would be. Because the women had intentionally disregarded two key aspects of the standard ordination process – they were ordained by retired bishops who had no official jurisdiction in the diocese of Pennsylvania, and they had not received proper authorization from the

bishops and standing committees of their own dioceses – theologians and canon lawyers debated whether they could still be considered "priests." Stringfellow, who had used his legal expertise to counsel the women deacons about possible courses of action in the months preceding the event, advanced what white Episcopalians considered to be a compelling argument on behalf of the Philadelphia 11.<sup>51</sup>

In an article in *The Witness* magazine, Stringfellow spoke of the pride that white Episcopalians felt because the unity of their denomination had not been broken by the passions that troubled the rest of the nation during the Civil War. Committed to unity at all costs, church leaders in the North faced a crisis when Richard Hooker Wilmer was consecrated as bishop of Alabama (of the Episcopal Church in the Confederate States of America) in 1862. After the end of the Civil War, Episcopalians who had remained loyal to the Union not only had to formulate a plan for welcoming Alabama and the other southern dioceses back into the fold, but they also had to decide whether they would recognize Wilmer's episcopal status, since he had technically been the citizen of another country and a member of another church at the time of his consecration. The validity of Wilmer's consecration was eventually accepted, Stringfellow noted, because Episcopal leaders valued the ecclesiastical ideal of catholicity more highly than the secular and political issue (i.e., slavery) that had sundered the United States in 1861. Affirming a still powerful church tradition that celebrated "the spirit of a primitive fellowship" uniting *white* church members in the North and *white* church



members in the South – African Americans being granted no agency or role in the discussion – Stringfellow argued that twentieth-century Episcopalians should emulate what their nineteenth-century counterparts accomplished in 1865. Thus, without mentioning how the process of sectional reconciliation after the Civil War was predicated upon the supremacy of whites over blacks, Stringfellow asked Episcopalians to regard the Philadelphia 11 in 1974 as favorably as their counterparts a hundred years earlier had regarded the *Confederate* bishop of Alabama.<sup>52</sup>

Stringfellow's appeal suggested the course that the church eventually followed when it recognized the Philadelphia ordinations as valid but irregular, and the historical example he cited received no criticism at the time.<sup>53</sup> Reexamined in a different light today, however, his 1974 *Witness* article seems to advance a highly questionable argument on behalf of the validity of the ordinations. Despite the words of many of the participants about the event's confluence with the civil rights movement, Stringfellow's understanding of the ordinations virtually bleaches them of any positive racial meaning by negating their association with the empowerment of people of color. In his assessment of the

service at the Church of the Advocate, African Americans were rendered "invisible" (to use Ralph Ellison's famous metaphor) and only white church people were portrayed as exercising agency and power.

Although William Stringfellow, Daniel Corrigan, and the other white Episcopalians who took part in the Philadelphia ordinations said they were committed to the equality of all people and believed (as the altar frontal at the Advocate said) that in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, black nor white, male nor female," they could not entirely escape the web of racism that continually snares white Americans. If anyone is tempted to become complacent about the egalitarian goals that the women ordinands and other participants sought to attain, it is wise to remember how power in the United States is invariably aligned along lines of race as well as of gender. As this final narrative suggests, implementation of a universal principle such as "equality" usually takes place in actual political and cultural circumstances where, despite every good intention, troubling conflicts and disparities can still arise.<sup>54</sup> I do not expect that such an analysis will wholly surprise those who read this essay, but I do hope it will aid in identifying and better understanding the immense power of racism within American society and within the Episcopal Church.



## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Gardiner H. Shattuck Jr., *Episcopalians and Race: Civil War to Civil Rights* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000).
- <sup>2</sup> Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Knopf, 1979), 170 ("mass constituency" quotation), 173, 195 ("something of their own" quotation); and Dorothy Dawson Burlage, "Truths of the Heart," in Constance Curry et al., *Deep in Our Hearts: Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 103, 118 ("suffocating roles" quotation).
- <sup>3</sup> Pauli Murray, *Pauli Murray: The Autobiography of a Black Activist, Feminist, Lawyer, Priest, and Poet* (1987; reprint, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 362.
- <sup>4</sup> Murray, *Autobiography*, 359-68; Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963; reprint, New York: Norton, 1983), 383-84; David Chalmers, *And the Crooked Places Made Straight: The Struggle for Social Change in the 1960s*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 146-58; and James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 545, 646-47.
- <sup>5</sup> "A Group of Concerned Women Gathered Together at Graymoor, April 24-26, 1970" in Box 121: Folder 2182, Pauli Murray Papers (MC 412), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Mass.; and Murray, *Autobiography*, 418-19.
- <sup>6</sup> Carter Heyward, *A Priest Forever: One Woman's Controversial Ordination in the Episcopal Church* (1976; reprint, Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim, 1999), 46-52; and Pamela W. Darling, *New Wine: The Story of Women Transforming Leadership and Power in the Episcopal Church* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley, 1994), 116-20.
- <sup>7</sup> Emily C. Hewitt and Suzanne R. Hiatt, *Women Priests: Yes or No?* (New York: Seabury, 1973), 19-21.
- <sup>8</sup> Heather Ann Huyck, "To Celebrate a Whole Priesthood: The History of Women's Ordination in the Episcopal Church," Ph.D. diss. (University of Minnesota, 1981), 21-22.
- <sup>9</sup> Darling, *New Wine*, 127-29; and Huyck, "To Celebrate a Whole Priesthood," 105-24.
- <sup>10</sup> Paul M. Washington, "Other Sheep I Have": *The Autobiography of Father Paul M. Washington*, [ed.] David McI. Gracie (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 164-66; and Huyck, "To Celebrate a Whole Priesthood," 109, 112.
- <sup>11</sup> Alla Bozarth-Campbell, *Womanpriest: A Personal Odyssey* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 79-83.
- <sup>12</sup> Washington, "Other Sheep I Have," 166.
- <sup>13</sup> "Eleven Are Unlawfully Made 'Priests,'" *The Living Church* (August 18, 1974): 5.
- <sup>14</sup> George W. Rutler, "In Philadelphia, a Storm of Reaction," *The Living Church* (August 25, 1974): 6-7; "Defying Church, Women State Their Views," *The Living Church* (August 25, 1974): 7; "Eleven Are Unlawfully Made 'Priests,'" 5-6; Darling, *New Wine*, 129; and Washington, "Other Sheep I Have," 161-72. The women ordained were Merrill Bittner, Alla Bozarth-Campbell, Alison Cheek, Emily Hewitt, Carter Heyward, Suzanne Hiatt, Marie Moorefield, Jeannette Piccard, Betty Schiess, Katrina Swanson, and Nancy Wittig. Antonio Ramos, the bishop of Costa Rica, was also vested and stood at the altar during service.
- <sup>15</sup> Charles Willie, quoted in Bozarth-Campbell, *Womanpriest*, 130-39.
- <sup>16</sup> Murray, *Autobiography*, 430-31.
- <sup>17</sup> Paul R. Griffin, *Seeds of Racism in the Soul of America* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim, 1999), 4-7 ("continue to heap" quotation on 5), 104-13 ("rode into power" quotation on 113), 120-22.
- <sup>18</sup> Charlayne Hunter, "Many Blacks Wary of 'Women's Liberation' Movement in U.S.," *New York Times* (November 17, 1970): 47, 60 (source of Beal quotation); Toni Morrison, "What the Black Woman Thinks About Women's Lib," *New York Times Magazine* (August 22, 1971): 14-15, 63-64, 66; and Susan M. Hartmann, *The Other Feminists: Activists in the Liberal Establishment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 176-79.
- <sup>19</sup> Mae Massie Eberhardt, quoted in Hartmann, *Other Feminists*, 48.



- <sup>20</sup> Virginia L. Brereton, "United and Slighted: Women as Subordinated Insiders," in *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960*, ed. William R. Hutchison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 163-64.
- <sup>21</sup> For background on these racial conventions, see Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon, 1998), 107-8; and Louise Michele Newman, *White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 56-69.
- <sup>22</sup> Frances A. Benz to the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity, from Cleveland Heights, Ohio (March 5, 1962) in Box 17, Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity Records (Accession Record 98.122), Archives of the Episcopal Church, Austin, Tex.
- <sup>23</sup> Olga C. Walker, "Rights for Women," letter in *The Living Church* (May 1, 1966): 3.
- <sup>24</sup> Mary Sudman Donovan, "Beyond the Parallel Church: Strategies of Separatism and Integration in the Governing Councils of the Episcopal Church," in *Episcopal Women: Gender, Spirituality, and Commitment in an American Mainline Denomination*, ed. Catherine M. Prelinger (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 138-40.
- <sup>25</sup> *Showdown at Seattle* (New York: Seabury, 1968), 7-56; and Darling, *New Wine*, 92-93.
- <sup>26</sup> Ilse S. Helmus, "UTO Budgets," letter in *The Living Church* (February 11, 1968): 13.
- <sup>27</sup> Dorothy A. Faber, "Another Opinion," *The Living Church* (January 21, 1968): 12 (source of quotations); and Dorothy A. Faber, "Menticide in the Churches - Part I," *The Christian Challenge* (March 1968): 7-8.
- <sup>28</sup> Hartmann, *Other Feminists*, 99-100.
- <sup>29</sup> Jo-Ann Price, "Executive Council: Propose \$700,000 for IFCO," *The Living Church* (March 17, 1968): 24; Donovan, "Beyond the Parallel Church," 148-50; and Darling, *New Wine*, 96-98.
- <sup>30</sup> Theodora Sorg, quoted in [Jo-Ann Price], "Executive Council: Chicago Police Scored," *The Living Church* (October 13, 1968): 22.
- <sup>31</sup> "NCC Report," *The Living Church* (December 28, 1969): 6-7; and Hartmann, *Other Feminists*, 106-7.
- <sup>32</sup> Cynthia Wedel, "Let's Change Our Approach to Social Action," *The Episcopalian* (October 1970), 14-16, 50.
- <sup>33</sup> Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender: 1875 to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 14-16.
- <sup>34</sup> Joan R. Gundersen, "Women and the Parallel Church: A View from Congregations," in Prelinger, *Episcopal Women*, 112-13, 122-23.
- <sup>35</sup> Paul Moore Jr., "Inner-City - Battle Line," *The Witness* (March 31, 1960): 9 (source of quotation); Malcolm Boyd, "Communication," in *On the Battle Lines*, ed. Malcolm Boyd (New York: Morehouse-Barlow, 1964), 241-42; and Robert S. Ellwood, *The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace: American Religion in a Decade of Conflict* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 167-68.
- <sup>36</sup> Gibson Winter, *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches: An Analysis of Protestant Responsibility in the Expanding Metropolis* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961), 78-79 (quotations on 79); and "Last Train to Babylon," *Time* (October 10, 1955): 73.
- <sup>37</sup> Evans, *Personal Politics*, 86-88, 233-35; and Casey Hayden, "Fields of Blue," in Curry et al., *Deep in Our Hearts*, 366.
- <sup>38</sup> *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Policy Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor, 1965); "The Negro Family: Visceral Reaction," *Newsweek* (December 6, 1965): 38-40; and Chalmers, *And the Crooked Places Made Straight*, 161-62.
- <sup>39</sup> Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 5-7, 50-52 (quotations on 50, 52); and Orlando Patterson, *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries* (New York: Basic Civitas, 1998), 272-78. See also Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 281-82.
- <sup>40</sup> Cornel West, *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 20; and Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 91-98.



- <sup>41</sup> Newman, *White Women's Rights*, 7-19, 106, 169, 181-82. See also Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 107-8.
- <sup>42</sup> Darling, *New Wine*, 129.
- <sup>43</sup> "Dr. Blake among 283 Held in Racial Rally in Maryland," *New York Times* (July 5, 1963): 1, 44; and "Around the Nation," *Church and Race* (July 20, 1963): 11-12.
- <sup>44</sup> Author's interview of Philip T. Zabriskie, New York (September 20, 1995); Author's interview of Quintin E. Primo Jr., Hockessin, Del. (October 4, 1996); Author's interview of Franklin D. Turner, Philadelphia (November 20, 1995); Author's interview of John M. Burgess, Vineyard Haven, Mass. (June 7, 1995); Tollie L. Caution, draft of a form letter (January 30, 1968) in Folder 113-2-11, Records of the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church (Record Group 113), Archives of the Episcopal Church, Austin; Quinland R. Gordon to Quintin E. Primo et al., from New York (July 25, 1968), in Folder 87-25-10, General Convention Special Program Records (Record Group 87), Archives of the Episcopal Church, Austin; Robert C. Martin to the author, from Granville, Ohio (September 1, 1995), 1-3; Vine Deloria Jr., "GCSP: The Demons At Work," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 47 (1978): 83-92; and Harold T. Lewis, *Yet With a Steady Beat: The African American Struggle for Recognition in the Episcopal Church* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1996), 155-57, 223-24.
- <sup>45</sup> Burgess interview; Executive Council of the Episcopal Church, Minutes of the Meeting (December 12-14, 1967), 108-9, in Record Group 40, Archives of the Episcopal Church, Austin; Tollie L. Caution, "The Protestant Episcopal Church: Policies and Rationale Upon Which Support of Its Negro Colleges Is Predicated," *Journal of Negro Education* (Summer 1960): 274-83; "Radical Changes Made at Negro Colleges," *The Witness* (January 4, 1968): 17; and William B. Spofford Jr., "Restructure and Tooling-Up Highlight Council Session," *The Witness* (March 7, 1968): 3.
- <sup>46</sup> Kenneth Hughes to Daniel Corrigan, from Cambridge, Mass. (January 17, 1968), in Folder 113-2-11, Records of the Presiding Bishop, Austin.
- <sup>47</sup> John M. Burgess to Daniel Corrigan, from Boston (January 8, 1968), 1-2, in Folder 113-2-11, Records of the Presiding Bishop, Austin.
- <sup>48</sup> Metropolitan Chapter of the Union of Black Clergy and Laity of the Episcopal Church [to John E. Hines, from New York (1968)], 1-2, in Folder 87-25-10, General Convention Special Program Records, Austin.
- <sup>49</sup> Author's interview of Walter D. Dennis, New York (October 2, 1995); Author's interview of Frederick B. Williams, New York (October 9, 1996); and "Black Churchmen Meet," *The Living Church* (July 7, 1968): 7 (source of quotation). For the many letters protesting Caution's forced retirement and Corrigan's role in it, see Folder 113-2-11, Records of the Presiding Bishop, Austin.
- <sup>50</sup> Burgess interview; David Johnson, "Myths About Integration," *The Witness* (June 11, 1964): 8-10; and Thomas S. Logan, Letter in "Backfire," *The Witness* (July 23, 1964): 15.
- <sup>51</sup> Darling, *New Wine*, 123-24, 132-37.
- <sup>52</sup> William Stringfellow, "The Church's Untold Story: Bishop Wilmer's 'Schismatical Consecration,'" *The Witness* (October 27, 1974): 10-11. For works of historiographical importance that would have influenced Stringfellow and encouraged him to suppress the memory of slavery's role in Civil War, see especially Paul H. Buck, *The Road to Reunion, 1865-1900* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1937) and DuBose Murphy, "The Spirit of a Primitive Fellowship: The Reunion of the Church," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 17 (1948): 435-48.
- <sup>53</sup> Darling, *New Wine*, 138-40.
- <sup>54</sup> Newman, *White Women's Rights*, 20-21, 184-85.